



Guiding Parents Through A Safe and Effective Pediatric Skincare Routine



A snapshot of critical information you'll need at the ready when it comes time to make a recommendation for your pediatric patients.

BY SOURAB CHOUDHURY, DO

>> Many people find pediatric skincare completely overwhelming. As dermatologists, it's our job to educate parents on the importance of proactivity and help them find a safe and effective skincare routine for their children. This dermatologist's guide will make those conversations easier; I've consolidated the most critical information you'll need at the ready when it comes time to make a recommendation.

In an age of online search engines and increased access to a wide range of healthcare advice, consumers often find themselves falling down an information rabbit hole. As an unprecedented amount of parents¹ consult the Internet about pediatric skincare, they are met with choice overload and, sometimes, misinformation² when it comes to their child's skincare products.

Unlike adult dermatology, pediatric dermatology is still relatively in its infancy.³ As a result, parents who self-research can sometimes do more harm than good as they attempt to learn about best practices and products for their child's skin. This is where dermatologists can help save the day—and why it's essential for us to give clear, rational advice to calm parents' nerves

and help their children's skin.

As a specialist in pediatric dermatology, I'm accustomed to suggesting over-the-counter (OTC) products and advising parents on the best skincare routines and products to help protect their children's skin. The good news is that pediatric skincare doesn't have to be daunting—as long as you're armed with the right information.

Here are several tips I give parents developing a child's skin care routine.

KEEP IT SIMPLE WHEN NAVIGATING THE OTC AISLE

I first start by reassuring parents that the best practices for a child's skincare regimen are relatively simple and that

navigating the OTC aisle doesn't have to be complicated.

A child's skincare regimen should include a daily bath with a gentle cleanser, followed by application of a moisturizer. In the summer, it's also important they wear sunscreen applied several times throughout the day, especially because a child's skin is more sensitive than most adults' skin.

Next, I advise parents that during their trip to the drugstore, they should pick up three types of products:

- **Gentle Cleansers.** A gentle cleanser should avoid any synthetics or dyes. Research shows that an ideal infant cleanser⁴ stops oils and other impurities from mixing

The key to a successful pediatric skincare routine is simple: cleanse, moisturize daily, and regularly apply sunscreen. By helping parents steer clear of harmful ingredients and unnecessarily pricey products, dermatologists can ensure parents are being kind to their children's skin and their own wallets. As children grow, it's important for both dermatologists and parents to keep a close watch for signs of irritation and rashes. If regular irritation does occur, even after a parent has incorporated clean ingredients into their routine, it's essential to rule out eczema, allergies, or more severe skin conditions.

the**bottom**line

with water, making the removal of dirt and bacteria easier. I recommend cleansers like Cetaphil and Vanicream Gentle Wash for Babies or bar soaps like Dove that are mild, safe, and inexpensive choices.

- **Moisturizers.** Many soaps remove the skin's natural oils, making it harder for a child's skin to maintain moisture. Depending on how dry their skin is, I tell caregivers that it might be worth looking into a cream or ointment rather than a lotion. Children with particularly sensitive skin will need a moisturizer that includes ceramides, so I tend to recommend CeraVe, which was formulated with that very purpose in mind.
- **Sunscreens.** I start any sun protection conversation by educating parents on the differences between physical and chemical sunscreens. While physical sunscreens can be whiter than chemical formulas, sticking to physical ones helps avoid potentially irritating or harmful chemicals that absorb directly into the skin. Plus, today's physical sunscreens boast more elegant formulations than the bright white zinc-based sunscreens of the past. I recommend the Blue Lizard Baby or California Baby sunscreen brands and always remind parents to dress their kids in UV-protective clothing and hats as part of their everyday summertime routine.

As parents establish their child's skincare routine, they may be surprised to learn that the products they choose can also play a role in protecting and strengthening their child's skin barrier. By following a daily routine that incorporates a gentle cleanser and moisturizer without harsh chemicals—and staying on top of adequate sun protection—parents can help their child develop an even stronger skin barrier as they mature.

INGREDIENTS TO AVOID

Pediatric dermatologists know that the younger a child is, the more sensitive their skin tends to be. It's our duty to inform parents that their child's skin is typically more susceptible to irritants than adults' skin, and it's not uncommon for kids to develop skin irritations or allergies to common synthetic ingredients.

Therefore, no pediatric skincare routine conversation is complete without a discussion of ingredients to avoid. Though some of the following ingredients have been linked to an increased risk of cancer, I prefer to keep conversations with parents grounded in the potential for irritation and allergies to avoid coming across as alarmist. Here are talking points for educating parents about each hazardous ingredient:

- **Fragrance.** Everyone loves the idea of their baby smelling great, but products with fragrances are often associated with allergies, dermatitis, respiratory problems, and other potentially negative side effects.⁵ Plus, a baby's skin smells good on its own! To avoid any skin complications, ensure the moisturizer they choose is fragrance-free.
- **Parabens.** Parabens are widely used as preservatives in body washes, shampoos, facial cleansers, and deodorants. However, they can cause irritations and allergies in young children, so it's best to avoid these as well.
- **Formaldehyde.** Formaldehyde-releasing preservatives (FRPs) are sometimes used to help prevent bacterial growth, but this chemical can also lead to allergies and irritation and may even be harmful to the immune system. It's a good idea to avoid any cleansers, body washes, conditioners, or shampoos with this ingredient.
- **Sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS)/Sodium laureth sulfate (SLES).** One estimate reports that more than 90 percent

of shampoos and body washes contain sulfates.⁶ SLSs can irritate the eyes, skin, and lungs, and the ingredient sometimes interacts poorly with other chemical products.

- **Synthetic Dyes.** Often labeled as FD&C or D&C, coloring derived from petroleum or coal tar sources are potential irritants that children can develop allergies to. While The European Union⁷ has banned it, parents in the United States should be wary, because it can still be found in many beauty (and food) products.
- **Propylene glycol.** Regularly found in moisturizers and sunscreen, propylene glycol is a small, organic alcohol used primarily for skin conditioning. However, it's been known to cause dermatitis and hives, even in concentrations as low as two percent.⁸ This is another ingredient to avoid in any over-the-counter search.
- **Sunscreen Chemicals.** Chemicals are commonly found in sunscreen and operate as agents to absorb ultraviolet light, but the consequences are unknown if a large amount is absorbed. Avoid using sunscreens that include chemicals like benzophenone, avobenzone, PABA, homosalate, and methoxycinnamate. Instead, opt for zinc or titanium-based sunscreens.

Of course, adherence to a completely chemical-free product list 100 percent of the time can be extremely challenging. It's important to remind patients that they should do the best they can to follow these recommendations and remain willing to make changes if their child's skin exhibits any negative reactions.

OVER-MARKETING PRODUCTS TO PARENTS

According to Adroit Market Research,⁹ the baby skincare market will reach \$18.93 billion by 2025, and dermatologists are keenly aware of the overwhelming

demand for these products. For a parent, though, the sheer amount of products on the market today only adds to the confusion inherent in selecting a safe and effective skincare regimen.

Pediatric skincare marketing can make matters worse, often playing into consumers' fears about the sensitivity of their children's skin and promoting more expensive products with trendy ingredients.

Parents are often surprised—and relieved—to hear that many baby-marketed products can actually be avoided because they ironically use harsher ingredients and include potentially irritating fragrances. It's also crucial to remind parents that the products they purchase for their children don't have to be the most expensive products on the market. The important thing is that they pay attention to the ingredients included in the products they purchase and identify which formulas their child's skin responds to best.

CHANGING UP THE ROUTINE

The skincare products a parent chooses for their baby will likely differ from the ones they use as their child ages. On the one hand, a baby's skin is more sensitive than older skin; on the other, a child's skin can develop irritations to products that were once harmless. As our children grow, it's important for both dermatologists and parents to keep a close watch for signs of irritation and rashes. If regular irritation does occur, even after a parent has incorporated clean ingredients into their routine, then it's time for a follow-up appointment to rule out eczema, allergies, or more severe skin conditions.

In the end, the key to a successful pediatric skincare routine is simple: cleanse, moisturize daily, and regularly apply sunscreen. But, of course, not all cleansers, moisturizers, and sunscreens are created equal. By helping parents steer clear of harmful ingredients and unnecessarily pricey products, we can ensure they are being kind to their children's skin and their own wallets. They'll be empowered for a smooth trip down the OTC aisle—and hopefully, a smoother, healthier complexion on their child's skin to match. ■

Sourab Choudhury, DO is board-certified dermatologist and the Chief Medical Officer at The Dermatology Specialists, a full-service dermatology practice with 10 locations across New York City. He is also a Clinical Instructor in the Department of Dermatology at The Mount Sinai School of Medicine. He attended medical school at Michigan State University and completed his fellowship at NYU Medical Center.

1. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4526953/>
2. <https://www.aad.org/media/news-releases/skin-care-product-safety>
3. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5367868/>
4. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3439947/>
5. <http://www.ewg.org/skindeep/ingredient/702512/FRAGRANCE/>
6. <https://www.besthealthmag.ca/best-looks/skin/the-truth-about-sulfates/>
7. <https://cspinet.org/eating-healthy/ingredients-concern/food-dyes>
8. http://www.ewg.org/skindeep/ingredient/705315/PROPYLENE_GLYCOL/
9. <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2019/04/25/1809298/0/en/Baby-Skin-Care-Market-to-hit-18-93-Billion-by-2025-Global-Analysis-by-Key-Trends-Size-Share-Product-offering-and-Key-Players-Adroit-Market-Research.html>